

The Language of Discord in The Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

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The fifties of the twentieth century saw an upsurge of tremendous anti-imperialistic and anti-colonial revolutionary upheavals, and the socio-political, religious and psychological turmoil of the Africans find a graphic reflection in the novels of Ngugiwa Thiong'o. Ngugi's novels provide a mirror to the chaos of the period, highlighting all the conflicts and passions of human drama coupled with historical objectivity. Through his powerful usage of language, he exhibits his personal and social vision and exposes the picture of the evolution of the African society from the colonial to the independent and the post-colonial status. He chooses to critically examine and evaluate the Kenyan history through the two most significant aspects of cultural clash between the natives and the foreign invaders, namely, education and religion. He remarkably portrays the tragic position of the Kenyans torn by a lacerating discord of losing its cultural heritage and identity due to colonialism. This paper aims to highlight the epic struggle of the African people against colonialism laying emphasis on the thematic, linguistic and stylistic techniques used by Ngugi to expose the dynamics of discord experienced at the multi-dimensional levels. The novels have been explored with a view to highlight how they have contributed to the discourse of the motif of discord in its varied dimensions. This paper concludes on the note that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has made a significant contribution to the African points of view and perspectives on life, politics, culture and history and his novels have earned him a well-deserved reputation that marks him out as a visionary and a writer of the protest literature. His vision encompasses mankind as a whole and is global in its scope.

Ngugi's novels hold a mirror to his personal and social visions and expose the picture of the evolution of the African society from the colonial to the independent and the post-colonial status. This paper aims to highlight the epic struggle of the African people against colonialism as portrayed through the novels written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. It lays emphasis on the thematic, linguistic and stylistic techniques used by Ngugi to expose the dynamics of discord at many

levels and dimensions. The theme of discord highlighted in his works, between colonialism and anti-colonialism assumes accuracy on account of its width of canvas, the variety and depth of its texture.

It is evident that the embedded narratives in Ngugi's works comprise a network of metaphors and images which enrich the setting as well as intensify characterization, expand thematic discourse, and clarify a certain vision. Every aspect of the oral tradition is present in his novels; from the narratives of epical style to myths, songs for every occasion, proverbs, figures of speech, folktales and fables, chants and incantations, names and naming styles, ceremonies, language and imagery and is deeply rooted in the traditional cultures of Africa. The novelist has assimilated all these features to give it distinctive qualities of its own, penetrating and transforming its structure, extending its scope and making it a dynamic vehicle for exploring historical, social, cultural, political, personal and psychological themes for articulating human problems.

Born in the Gikuyu tradition in Kenya during British colonization, Ngugi's schooling imposed on him the exclusive use of English in education, the native cultural activities in his writings. Later in 1967, while studying in Britain, he publicly questioned his erstwhile use of English. In 1968, in association with two of his colleagues, he demanded the Africanization of the curriculum, which would place 'African orature' at the centre of the syllabus as well as African languages and his subsequent involvement in politics only strengthened his convictions. Thus after seventeen years of active involvement in English literature, during which he wrote four novels, *Weep not, Child, The River Between, A Grain of Wheat, and Petals of Blood*, he broke with this tradition by deciding henceforth to use Gikuyu in all his future works. In deciding to write in his own language, Ngugi hoped to reconnect himself to the African novel of his new commitment and rejected what he called 'Afro-European or Euro-African' literature and believed that a piece of writing ought not only to be rooted in African art, tradition and culture, but had to be originally expressed in an African language.

Ngugi profusely uses language, verbal and non-verbal, symbolic and silent to effectively portray discord at the individual and the situational levels. He introduces the theme of discord in the opening chapters of his novels, a technique unique in itself. His varied characters representing different strata of society, offer scope for the usage of powerful and rich language. His vivid description of the landscape in his novels is symbolic of the dispute experienced by the

Africans. The Mau Mau Rebellion and the *Uhuru* celebrations are symbolic of discord. Circumcision, an important custom of the Africans, is a bone of dissension between the settlers and the blacks. Ngugi's confrontation with the present is charged with a historic sense, and in many ways, he attempts to portray the complete displacement of the black psyche in the colonized world. It is with this cultural consciousness that he exposes to the world the conflict between the settlers and the natives.

Ngugi through his descriptions of the landscape introduces the importance of land in the lives of the Africans. The advent and subsequent invasion of the settlers, their usurpation of land, its control and exploitation, reflect the dominant conflict in a multi-racial society. In *The River Between*, "beautiful and young and fertile" land "unaffected by turbulent forces outside it", ¹ gives the first impression that the fertile land of Kenya basically belonged to the Africans who believed that their land was their God. 'This land I give it to you, oh, man and woman. It is yours to rule and till you and your prosperity'. The advent of the white man is thus expressed, "There shall come a people with clothes like butterflies". ² Ngugi exhibits the ignorance of the Africans about the railway line laid by the whites and their deep belief in their impenetrable nature of the hills. "The white man cannot speak the languages of the hills. And knows not the ways of the land".³ The invasion of the white man spreads ripples of hysteria in the Gikuyu society. "In the past years, things were changing. The pattern of seasons were broken ... perhaps, it had to do with the white man."⁴.

In *Weep Not, Child*, Njoroge gains insight that he is chosen as their saviour. "The land needed him and God had given him an opening so that he might come back and save his family and the whole country".⁵ In *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika says: "It is not politics, Wambuku, it is life. Is he a man who lets another take away his land and freedom? Has a slave life?"⁶ In *Petals of Blood*, Boro says, "For the farm was the woman he had wooed and conquered. He had to keep an eye on her lest she should be possessed by someone else".⁷ Thus the loss of land and the description of the landscape become a strong silent presence and a powerful symbolic language to highlight the discord in the lives of the Africans.

¹ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, London : Heinemann, 1965. p.20

² Ibid. p.2

³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, London: Heinemann, 1965 . p.7

⁴ Ibid. p.68

⁵ Ibid. p.119

⁶ Ibid. p.85

⁷ Ibid. p.144

The River Between is aesthetically shaped and united by image patterns that deal with the major theme, the land, and is presented with simplicity and without any circumlocution. Although Ngugi does not fall into the trap of simple allegory, when he describes, “the two ridges lay side by side...Between them was a valley ...They were like any sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their creator”. “One was Kameno and the other Makuyu”, ⁸yet, the struggle between them is extended to include all of Kenya. The first paragraph, then, presents a microcosm of the structure of the book - the tribal geography of the land giving rise to the conflict which is embroiling all over Kenya. The antagonistic villagers have, both literally and figuratively, lost their ‘life-stream’. The novel opens with an image of the river Honia, which gives ‘life and unity’ to the ridges and ends with the same image that has undergone a qualitative change. “The land was now silent. The two ridges lay side by side hidden in the darkness. And Honia River went on flowing between them ...reaching into the hearts of the people of Makayu and Kameno”.⁹ Honia has become the river of questions and uncertainties sending out throbs of fear through darkness and the images of the sleeping lions recur throughout the book, representing the dangers of the awakening awareness of the ridges. Nature identifies the conflict and the exploitation of the whites which is symbolized through rain. “Carrying away the soil. Corroding, eating away the earth. Stealing the land. And that was the cry, the cry on every ridge. The earth was important to the tribe.” ¹⁰

Ngugi’s usage of images and motifs to highlight the language of discord is remarkable. He introduces his readers to the ‘lyrical presence’ (the collective consciousness) of the novel. This stylistic convention is identified by the use of the Second Person Pronoun “you” injecting the reader into the heart of the story. An effective technique, the Second Person is the communal element entering into the situation, the unseen witness who understands and records everything. For example, *In Weep Not, Child*, the lyrical presence introduces the motif of land - “You could tell the land of Black People because it was red, rough and sickly, while the land of the white settlers was green and was not lacerated into small strips... Some people said that the black people should stick together and take trade only to their black brethren.” ¹¹ The communal element is also present in the recurrent motif of the black solidarity, reflected frequently in the

⁸ Ibid. p.1

⁹ Ibid p.152

¹⁰ Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, London : Heinemann, 1965. p. 165

¹¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, London: Heinemann, 1964. p.p. 7-8

African child's inability to understand the other ethnic groups. "You did not know what to call an Indian. Was he also a white man? Did he too come from England?"¹²

In *A Grain of Wheat*, with no central character, the communal consciousness is the village of Thabai itself. The novel begins four days prior to Uhuru (Independence) for Kenya and the village of Thabia is involved in the final preparations for Uhuru. The novel gravitates around this central event, the struggle for the Independence and, therefore, becomes the symbolic focus of the people's aspirations and social dreams, as well as their emotional tensions and private suffering which violence has caused to the community. All celebrations in the novels are symbolic because they enable the characters to express varied emotions through common and simple gestures.

The dawn of the Independence found the African tribals confronted with the twin problems of "tradition and change". The twin devices of "surprise and anticipation" are employed by Ngugi in a particularly striking way and dramatized in the clashes between the African religion with its ritualistic worship and sacrificial offerings and the Christian faith. Enabling the whites to settle down with their missionary at Siriana, a place situated on the outskirts of the two ridges, Ngugi succeeds in "evoking the atmosphere of the ridges and chronicling the traditions and customs they embrace".¹³ Joshua's house symbolizes his mission in life to rob the African of his cultural heritage and identity, through his preaching of Christianity. "The round thatched huts standing in groups of three or four convey a picture of conformity broken only by Joshua's house which has a tin roof and is rectangular."¹⁴

Ngugi's usage of the Biblical language and references to expose the exploitative nature of the whites is also remarkable. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Mugo recalls: "...the day the white man came to the country, clutching the book of God in both hands, a magic witness that white man was a messenger from the Lord. His tongue was coated with sugar; his humility was touching... soon the people saw the white man had imperceptibly acquired more land to meet the growing needs of his position. ... they looked beyond the laughing face of the white man and suddenly saw a long line of other red strangers who carried, not the Bible, but the sword." Kihika recalls: "We went to their church... Mubia said, Let us shut our eyes. We did. You know, his remained open so that he could read the word. When we opened our eyes, our land was gone and the

¹² Ibid. p.8

¹³ C.B. Robson, Ngugi wa Thiongo, London: Heinemann, 1979 p.1

¹⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, London: Heinemann, 1965. p.28

Sword of Flames stood on guard...he went on reading the word, beseeching us to lay our treasures in heaven where no moth would corrupt them. But he laid his on earth, our earth".¹⁵.

Siriana Mission School functions as the perfect tool of colonial administration alienating young minds from their native culture with an aim to incite an attitude of 'skepticism and contempt towards their belief systems'. Livingstone and his missionaries considered the traditional customs as "satanic" works. They called the Gikuyu God, 'the prince of darkness' and the Africans as the 'children of darkness'. At Siriana it was taught thus: "Those who refuse him are the children of darkness; these sons and daughters of evil one, will go to Hell; They will burn and burn forever more, world unending. These strong words frightened the converts and Joshua's body "shook to the very roots of his being". At Siriana, "he found a sanctuary and the white man's power and magic".¹⁶

In the *River Between*, Ngugi describes the importance of the custom of circumcision, a central point of conflict in its acceptance by the whites. "Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept the people together. ... It was the core of the social structure and something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and spiritual bias of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more."¹⁷ When Joshua's daughter, Muthoni died of circumcision, "he was almost mad and small foams of saliva could be seen at the sides of his mouth" and he felt that she deserved it and treated her as an "outcast". He believed that Muthoni's death "forever confirmed the barbarity of Gikuyu customs". As a Christian fanatic, "Joshua would never refrain from punishing a sin, even if this meant beating his wife". Adopting vigorous methods to suppress this custom, he thought "circumcision had to be rooted out if there was to be any hope of salvation for these people. It was Christ who would be fighting the Prince of Darkness through him... Now, the war was on".¹⁸ This conflict affects all of Ngugi's protagonists who could not make a choice between two conflicting faiths in the community and suffered between two loyalties. "Even Waiyaki was slightly embarrassed" in participating in the dances, yet he endured pain and suffering as a prelude to secret knowledge, "the numbness was wearing away...the skin alive again...pain was eating through him. That was the gate to the mystery to the hills... a

¹⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat, London:Heinemann, 1964, p.p.11-15

¹⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, London:Heinemann, 1965. p.29

¹⁷ Ibid. p.79

¹⁸ Ibid. p.56

religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth, as if his blood was an offering. Around him women were shouting and praising him. Such praises were lavished only on the brave".¹⁹

Ngugi effectively uses parallels and contrasts to highlight this discord in the minds of his characters. "Preparations for the initiations went on, while Joshua and his followers prepared for the birth of a saviour."²⁰ Talking about her plight, Muthoni says: "Tell Nyambura, I see Jesus. And I am a woman made beautiful in the tribe... I say, I am a Christian... I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe".²¹ In order to integrate the conflicting faith of Christianity and the way of the tribe, she pays a heavy price of death. Joshua's new belief could not stop his family from disintegration. Chege says, "You see what discord in the family does. If Joshua had not sold his heart to these people it would have been a simple case".²²

Ngugi efficiently employs irony in highlighting the notion that the blacks have to learn the white man's education in order to overthrow him. The need of the hour is to acquire education at par with the white man. Chege's assertion: "Salvation shall come from the hills ... Arise, Heed the prophecy. Be true to your people and ancient rituals...Go to the mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices",²³ also represents a new strategy of beating the white man by his own methods. Each time an African mother sends a child to the High School, 'it is like giving birth to him all over again'. This is not just a metaphysical internal struggle of the individual, but a kind of psychological confusion brought about by the rapid socio-cultural changes within society.

In *Petals of Blood*, the alienation of the educated protagonists from the soil is complete. As per the remark of an elder of the village, "the hands of a Msomi are themselves a book...Hands untouched by soil, it's as if they wear ngome."²⁴ The Siriana educated African capitalists provide a new dimension to the struggle of the neo-colonialism. When Munira arrives in Illmorog, there is only a dirt road described as " treacherous as those hags and brags an cripples." But later, it turns into a Trans-Africa road, linking Nairobi to Illmorog. "The road was built not to give content and reality to the visitor of a continent, but to show our readiness Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann 1977s ...every corner of the continent was

¹⁹ Ibid. p.p. 52-54

²⁰ Ibid. p.37

²¹ Ibid. p. 26 -43

²² Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, London:Heinemann, 1965 p.48

²³ Ibid .p.p.20-24

²⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann 1977, p.9

now within the reach of international capitalist robbery and exploitation.”²⁵ The novelist describes the desolate conditions that prevail. “Within only ten years... Illmorog peasants had been displaced from the land; some had joined the army of workers. Others were semi-workers with one foot in a plot of land and one foot in a factory.”²⁶ Ironically, the Africans were brought closer together in one way, but estranged in another. Ngugi, by employing methods of parallels and contrasts, points out that the “Independence marks the end of one’s struggle, it is also the beginning of another.”²⁷

Ngugi’s choice of titles for his novels is suggestive of the theme of discord. The epigraph of Ngugi’s novel, *Weep Not, Child*, is from Walt Whitman’s poem, “On the Beach at Night”. The weeping child is at the centre of the novel as he fears being exploited at the hands of the settlers. In *The River Between*, nature identifies the conflict and confirms the exploitation of the whites. The life-giving river Honia flows between the two ridges, Kameno and Makuyu, symbolizing their doubts, fears and uncertainties. *A Grain of Wheat* is about the Mau Mau Independence War. The epigraph taken from Corinthians, The Holy Bible, 15:36 acquires significance when the new African politicians inflict cruelty on the fellow Africans and in their death, new life will be born. In *Petals of Blood*, the title suggests the distortion of things in the society due to corruption, chaos and destruction. The blood suggests suffering. The flower becomes a symbol of Kenyan society and is a victim of evil. In the opening chapters of his novels, Ngugi introduces the buildup of socio-political and psychological discord prevalent in the society.

The Mau Mau Rebellion is also symbolic of the discord present between the peasants and the settlers when the Africans who were turned into ‘ahois’ fought for ‘uhuru’ and their land. In *A Grain of Wheat*, Kihika tells Mugo, “We don’t just kill anybody... we are not murderers. We are not hangmen like Robson – killing men or women without cause or purpose”.²⁸ Adept in argument and rude in political judgment, Kihika “turns the language of the Christians on themselves”.²⁹ He states that Christ’s death has failed to change anything and he justifies the Movement. “I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another....Everybody

²⁵ Ibid. p.262

²⁶ Ibid. p.302

²⁷ D Elders, A Review of A Grain of Wheat, ALT No. 1 (1968), p.52

²⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, A Grain of Wheat, London:Heinemann, 1964, p.16

²⁹ GD Killam An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi London:Heinemann 1980. p.59

who takes an oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is a Christ”.³⁰ Ngugi also reveals how the whites mowed down the freedom fighters. Mugo meets Gitogo, a youth “both deaf and dumb” who is killed by the Government troops. “Something hit him in the back. ... Apparently a bullet had touched his heart. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead”.³¹

The colonists and missionaries held a different view of the Mau Mau War. Colonel Robson opines, “One must use a stick. No Government can tolerate anarchy, no civilization can be built on this violence and savagery. Mau Mau is evil....Remember the African is a born actor, that's why he finds it so easy to lie”.³²

The most noticeable aspect in the methods of characterization of Ngugi is the use of impressionism, the internal reading of his characters’ emotional reactions to the external world, leading to a more introspective approach to character, and for this, he generally uses the third person narrator for his tales. The opening pages of *Weep Not, Child* are typical of Ngugi’s use of the third person to depict Njoroge’s feelings, “Ó mother, I’ll never bring shame to you. Just let me get there, just let me... It was just there, for himself; a bright future ... Aloud he said, “I like school”.³³ Ngugi’s use of the second person merges with Njoroge’s thoughts, “You did not know what to call an Indian, and was he also a white man? Did he too come from England?”³⁴ These are the thoughts of the reader, the communal centre (the second person), and those of the young boy – a merging of three points of view into one. As the story progresses, the alteration in character is witnessed and experienced by the reader – the African child’s growth into adulthood, presented impressionistically from his own ever-changing point of view. Thus Ngugi’s usage of the second person “you” is an extremely effective device for drawing the reader into his narrative.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngugi abolishes the usage of the second person and uses the communal “we” and its possessive “our”. Most of the important scenes are told from the point of view of the entire community, “most people from our village came to the meeting. This was Kihika’s day; it was Mugo’s day; it was our day.”³⁵

³⁰ Ngugi wa Thiongo, A Grain of Wheat, London: Heinemann, 1964, p.95

³¹ Ibid. p.6

³² Ngugi wa Thiongo, A Grain of Wheat, London: Heinemann, 1964, p.55-56

³³ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Weep Not, Child, London: Heinemann, 1964, p.3

³⁴ Ibid. p.8

³⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, A Grain of Wheat, London: Heinemann, 1967, p. 244.

Ngugi's characters are truly complex personalities, often presented psychologically where the inter-involvement of the characters leads to the downfall of the protagonists. There is considerable authorial commentary in the depiction of the character Njoroge in *Weep Not, Child*. Being an extremely sensitive child, with a fancy to daydream, school becomes a means of escape for Njoroge, and this is revealed in the three statements which occur on the same page of the text, "He clung to books and whatever the school had to offer... Education for him, as for many boys of his generation held the key to the future... The Bible was his favourite book."³⁶

Ngugi's selection of the saviour motif to describe his heroes is appropriate as they are admired for their appeal and sympathized for their failure. In *The River Between*, Ngugi mocks his tragic hero Waiyaki, who strives to be an engine for social change through his obsession with building more schools to unite the two contending factions. In place of education serving the requirement of unity, unity would serve the ends of education, highlighting, undoubtedly, an element of satire.

The saviour pattern was a total failure when operated in the universe of Chege, a compassionate representative of tribal beliefs; by Kabonyi as the leader of the secular and political Kiama, it was expounded in the Christian context by Joshua, who blamed everything on loyalty to God; and tested, by Waiyaki in his educational leadership. The saviour motif also includes female characters. When Muthoni attains harmony within her own life and when Nyambura recognizes Waiyaki's attempt to reconcile tribal and Christian biases, they think in saviour patterns. This imagery becomes universalized as Ngugi moves deeper into the human problems of all men rather than the immediate concerns of a few.

Ngugi's sensitive approach and use of language in the portrayal of the colonialists are remarkable. He clearly reveals their ambitions, arrogance, fear of failures, etc. In *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi provides a clear picture of the white man's impression and treatment of the African. 'With noble aspirations' the well meaning task of the colonialists was to tame "humans possessed of animal souls" who were like "donkeys or horses".³⁷ Mr. Howland's recruitment as an officer to combat the Mau Mau provides him with an opportunity to vent his fury on these "sub humans" and he is determined to "wring from every single man the last drop ... till he had

³⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, London: Heinemann, 1964, p.77

³⁷ Ibid. p.164

won victory for his God.³⁸ The Africans were taken as a ‘symbol of evil’, a ‘native often rendered as ‘secondary, abject, weak, feminine and other to Europe’’.³⁹ When he encounters rejection and hostility, he wants to “exterminate the brutes” and ‘eliminate the vermin’ and when thwarted, he reaches the ‘edge of madness’.

Thomas Robson in *A Grain of Wheat*, was considered as an “epitome of those dark days in our history...a man-eater, walking in the night and day He was death.... He was especially brutal to squatters...he called them Mau Mau and asked them to dig their own graves.”⁴⁰ When Thomson was ridiculed for his failure in handling the fighters, in “naked fury, he would apply the whip himself.” Shattered at Britain giving independence to ‘the vermin’, he pathetically cries: “We are not yet beaten...Africa cannot do without Europe”.⁴¹

Ngugi highlights the discord present in the white women characters. Thomson’s wife Margery, whose marital bonds suffer due to his life as a Colonial Officer, says, “With his eyes on promotion, she found it increasingly difficult to penetrate his inscrutable face till it became painful to summon even a minimum of emotion and tenderness from him. ... She could not share his agony. Instead, she had felt the shame of a child who sees a grown-up caught in the act of chasing a butterfly over fields and roads”.⁴² The white women choose the rebellious path of adultery for the temporary elation that is brought about by the “anarchic joy of breaking a law”, while the white man, motivated by bloodlust, is “degenerate and contaminated” and even discovers that “black women could be a good relief”.

In Ngugi’s argument, if literature must be written down, then it “becomes apparent how inadequate the word is to define the “verbal embodiment of a people’s creative spirit”. Pointing out the weight of the oral literature in the East African continent, Ngugi remarks that ‘East Africa, like the rest of the continent, is rich in songs, poems, and stories that go back to times immemorial, to Au and Agu’.⁴³

Both the forms and functions of the Africanized English used in the novels at the levels of syntax, lexis and semantics, reflect the diversity to create an African flavour in English language.

³⁸ Ibid. p.87

³⁹ Ibid. p.81

⁴⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *A Grain of Wheat*, London : Heinemann, 1967, p.186.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.188

⁴² Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *A Grain of Wheat*, London : Heinemann, 1967 p.p. 57-58

⁴³ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Home coming* London: Heinemann, 1972, p.68

Ngugi uses the direct lexical transfer technique - ‘Ugali’, ‘Uhuru’, ‘Njuka’, ‘Muhoi’ are Kiswahili terms. “He called Waiyaki to his thingira.”⁴⁴ “...a lunch of ugali and boiled sukuma wiki,”⁴⁵ “You have too much of the Foreigner’s maneno maneno in your heads”, “Did you have a good gathano harvest”.⁴⁶ He also introduces Semantic shifts, for e.g. In African society, it is improper to refer to sex designating terms in public and these terms are replaced with metaphorical and figurative language - ‘Many have eaten from Kareendi’s thighs’, ‘Knot in my head’, ‘forfeits’⁴⁷ “I would not be surprised to hear that you have tasted that woman. How do her goods taste? I wouldn’t mind giving her the works myself”.⁴⁸ Ngugi also uses coinage derived through pre-fixation, suffixation, reduplicating and compounding – ten cent Kareendi, Jesus-is-my-saviour type, stagger-a-staggering, flick-lick-lick-lick goes the barber’s scissors. Mr. Hot, Mr. Cold and Mr. Lukewarm (seriously involved in Mau Mau, no enthusiasm or somewhere in-between.) Ngugi uses African proverbs and riddles to provide a predominant African flavour in his works. Kagutui Ka Mucil gatihakagwo Ageni: the oilskin of the house is not for rubbing into the skin of strangers”.⁴⁹ “You eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you”.⁵⁰

Thus the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'o is employed as a weapon for reflecting the plight of the masses premised on the awareness that there is always a close relationship between the African literature and its historical context. The novels have been explored with a view to highlight how they have contributed to the discourse of the motif of discord in its varied dimensions.

This paper concludes on the note that Ngugi wa Thiong'o has made a significant contribution to the African points of view and perspectives on life, politics, culture and history and his novels have earned him a well-deserved reputation that marks him out as a writer of the protest literature. His vision encompasses mankind as a whole and is global in its scope.

⁴⁴ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, London: Heinemann, 1965. p.8

⁴⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann 1977. p.191

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.8

⁴⁷ Ngugi wa thiong'o, Devil on the Cross, London: Heinemann, 1982. p.25

⁴⁸ Ngugi wa thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat, London : Heinemann, 1967. p.159

⁴⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, The River Between, London: Heinemann, 1965. p.3

⁵⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann 1977. p.291

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